

# *News Release*

For Immediate Release

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Contact: [Robert Lesley](#) (601) 359-1135

## **CORN FARMERS URGED TO CALL INSURANCE AGENTS**

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If you are an insured corn farmer in Mississippi, then Agriculture Commissioner Lester Spell says it is time to contact your crop insurance agent. Aflatoxin (AF la toxin), a fungus that can render a corn crop worthless has hit the Louisiana crop hard and, Spell says it will probably turn up in Mississippi as well. "It's the beginning of our corn harvesting season and we are getting reports of aflatoxin in our corn crop," Spell said. "We may not be hit as hard as Louisiana but some of our farmers will have problems, so it's very important to start taking steps now to deal with the situation."

Aflatoxin is a by-product of the growth of the fungus *Aspergillus flavus* on corn kernels. It can show up during any growing season but tends to be particularly bad during stressful conditions such as drought. Grain elevators will typically refuse to accept corn that has an aflatoxin count of more than 20 parts per billion, based on samples taken when a farmer brings his crop to the elevator. In some instances, elevators will purchase corn with up to 150 parts per billion at a salvage value, generally much lower than the market value of uninfected corn.

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) is already working with crop insurance companies in the state and the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation to help farmers identify the scope of the problem. "We are beefing up our testing lab to handle the expected increase in testing requests," said Spell. "We are adding manpower and testing equipment at our lab in Stoneville, MS."

(More)

**Farmers who suspect that they may have the aflatoxin and who have crop insurance need to contact their agents immediately so that appropriate authorities can begin collecting samples. Larry Whitford, Regional Director of USDA's Risk Management Agency, advised all policyholders to review their policies, noting that the individual farmer should notify his insurance 15 days before harvest. "While we recognize that this will not always be possible, the farmer should make every effort to meet his obligation under the policy," Whitford said.**

**It is important to note that test results can vary greatly from sample to sample and that the grain elevator, not the insurance company or MDAC, will make the final decision on whether a load of grain can be shipped. Farmers should test early not only to determine whether they have aflatoxin in their fields, but how much they have. Aflatoxin levels above 300 parts per billion require special guidelines for disposal. If the crop is harvested, the farmer must dispose of the corn by trenching and burying the corn. If unharvested, the corn should be cut and disked into the ground.**